

Chub Sandhill Natural Area Preserve

387 acres - Sussex County, Virginia

The Site: Bordering the Nottoway River for more than two miles, this preserve features low sandhills that support the remnants of a fire-maintained natural community. Five plant species that are extremely rare in Virginia inhabit the site, two of which have been found nowhere else in the state. The preserve's low-lying areas provide habitat for four animal species that are rare in Virginia. This preserve was acquired with funds from the Parks and Natural Areas Bond.

Natural History: Once the shore of an ancient estuary, Chub Sandhill Natural Area Preserve's most significant acreage is characterized by deep, sandy soils, which historically supported fire-maintained natural communities. The dry nature of the sandy uplands made the area prone to fire from lightning strikes. It is also very likely that Native Americans frequently ignited fires that burned the area. However, in more modern times, fire has been suppressed here. Plants that depend on fire to reduce woody species competition, stimulate reproduction and open the canopy, have dwindled or disappeared. Many species have declined dramatically since the 1940s, when surveys revealed a great abundance and diversity of fire-adapted plants in the area.

Fortunately, some remnants of this habitat have survived. The rare natural community found here is classified as a "pine/scrub oak sandhill." It is dominated by two common tree species, loblolly pine (*Pinus taeda*) and southern red oak (*Quercus falcata*), but has a number of rare plants that make the community unusual for Virginia. Among these are pineland tick-trefoil (*Desmodium strictum*), golden puccoon (*Lithospermum carolinense*), queen's delight (*Stillingia sylvatica*), Virginia false-gromwell (*Onosmodium virginianum*) and hoary scurfpea (*Pedimelum canescens*).

Previous owners mined sand from the property. Conspicuous evidence of this includes shallow ponds that now are breeding habitat for a variety of amphibians, such as spotted salamanders (*Ambystoma maculatum*) and eastern narrowmouth toads (*Gastrophryne carolinensis*). These in turn attract kingfishers (*Ceryle alcyon*) and wading birds such as green-backed herons (*Butorides striatus*) and great blue herons (*Ardea herodias*).

The Nottoway River, which flows along the western and southern margins of the preserve, also provides important habitat for rare species. Recent discoveries close to the river include a salamander called the dwarf waterdog (*Necturus punctatus*), a dragonfly called the spine-crowned clubtail (*Gomphus abbreviatus*) and two species of damselflies – the duckweed firetail (*Telebasis byersi*) and the burgundy bluet (*Enallagma dubium*). Much of the property along the river is bottomland, dominated by trees such as swamp tupelo (*Nyssa biflora*), swamp chestnut oak (*Quercus michauxii*), red maple (*Acer rubrum*) and bald cypress (*Taxodium distichum*). This wetland habitat plays a crucial role in maintaining water quality and as a buffer zone when the river overflows its banks. The swamp is prime nesting habitat for a great variety of birds, including prothonotary warblers (*Protonotaria citrea*) and wood

ducks (*Aix sponsa*) and is home to the secretive bobcat (*Felis rufus*).

Resource Management: Essential to restoring and maintaining the rare plants and natural communities at Chub Sandhill is the re-introduction of fire. Prescribed burns are conducted at planned intervals and Stewardship scientists carefully monitor the effects of fire on rare species. Ultimately, the objective is to reduce the abundance of many common woody species and restore community structure and composition to that of an open-canopied pine savanna.

Public Access: A small parking lot, trail and overlook provide visitors opportunities for low impact activities, such as bird watching, hiking and nature photography. Off-road vehicles, bicycles, horseback riding and unrestrained pets would damage the preserve's resources and are not permitted.

Location: Chub Sandhill Natural Area Preserve is located on the northeastern side of the Nottoway River where it is crossed by Route 631 in Sussex County. The preserve borders both sides of Route 631 for about one mile east of the Nottoway River.

From Richmond, take I-95 south of Petersburg to Route 35. Follow Route 35 south to Route 631. Turn right on Route 631. Go about 2.4 miles to the parking area on the right.

From Norfolk, take U.S. Route 58 west past Franklin to Business 58 into Courtland. Then take Route 35 north to Route 631. Turn left on Route 631. Go about 2.4 miles to the parking area on the right.

Natural Heritage Resources

Plants

pineland tick-trefoil (*Desmodium strictum*) G4/S2
golden puccoon (*Lithospermum carolinense*) G4G5/S1
Virginia false-gromwell (*Onosmodium virginianum*) G4/S2
hoary scurfpea (*Pedimelum canescens*) G3G4/S1
queen's delight (*Stillingia sylvatica*) G4G5T7/S1

Animals

burgundy bluet (*Enallagma dubium*) G5/S2
spine-crowned clubtail (*Gomphus abbreviatus*) G3G4/S2
dwarf waterdog (*Necturus punctatus*) G4/SU
duckweed firetail (*Telebasis byersi*) G5/S1

Community

pine/scrub oak sandhill

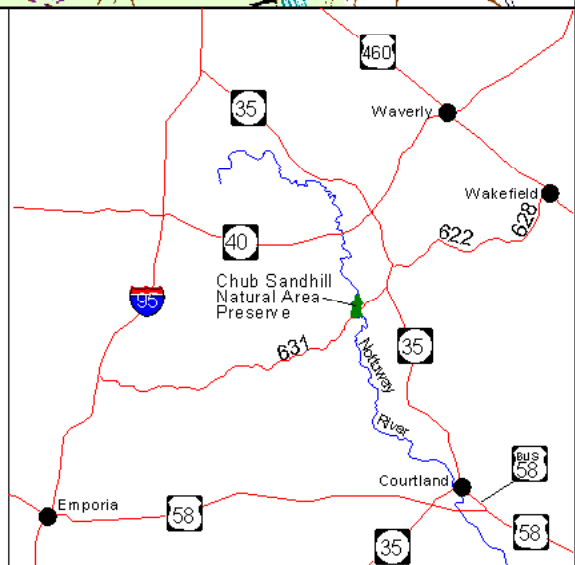
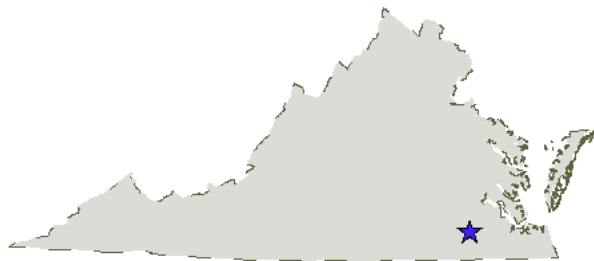
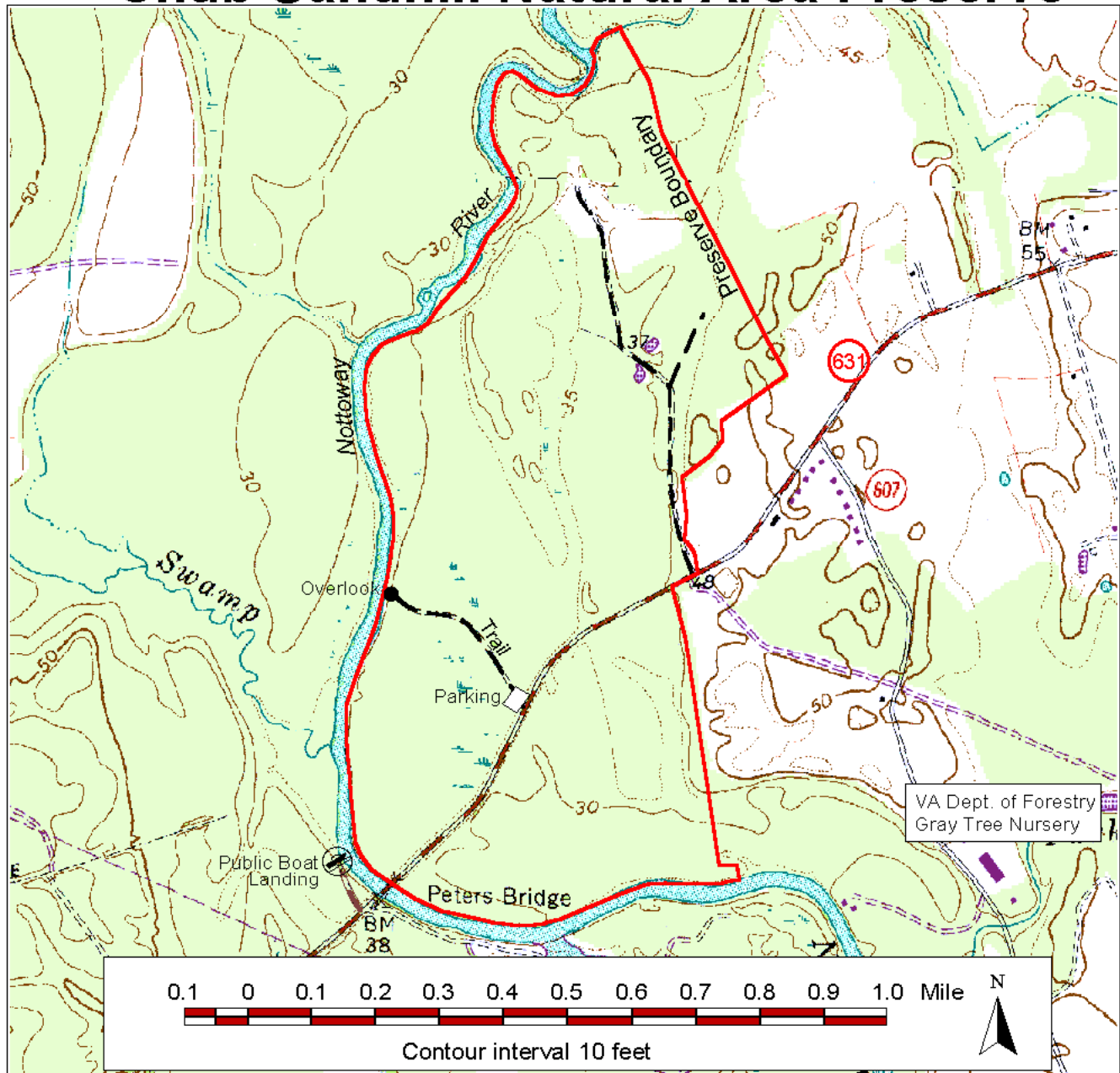
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Department of Conservation & Recreation
CONSERVING VIRGINIA'S NATURAL & RECREATIONAL RESOURCES

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